

Fisher-Seymour House
East side of Route 13
Accomac
Accomack County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-624

HABS
VA
FAC,
9-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

FISHER-SEYMOUR HOUSE

HABS
VA
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9-

Address: East side of Route 13, Accomac, Accomack County, Virginia.

Present Owner: Mrs. George T. Buck, Jr., c/o Mrs. Samuel J. Ross, Accomac, Virginia.

Present Occupant: Mrs. Samuel J. Ross (mother of owner)

Present Use: Residence.

Brief Statement of Significance: An example of the type of house on the Eastern Shore of Virginia known as the Big House, Little House, Colonnade, and Kitchen.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: 1791, Dr. Fenwick Fisher; 1816, Thomas R. Fisher; 1820, Mrs. William P. Custis; 1869, John W. Gillett; 1906, Judge Samuel T. Ross; 1926, Samuel J. Ross for life, and then to his daughter Jane Custis Ross (now Mrs. George T. Buck, Jr.).

2. Date of erection: Dr. Fenwick Fisher probably built the small kitchen end shortly after 1791 in order to secure his deed. Largest section was probably built about 1816 by Thomas R. Fisher.

3. Notes on alterations and additions: Small section erected about 1791 and large section added about 1816. Several interior alterations and repairs over the years. Greatest alteration seems to have been to the interior of the colonnade section.

4. Sources of information: Court records; present occupant, Mrs. Ross; Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore, A History of North Hampton and Accomack Counties, 2 vols. (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1951); old timers who have always lived in the area; personal inspection.

B. Historical Events Connected with Structure: It is traditional that the small building in back of the house served as a Post Office during the Civil War. Undersigned unable to verify from the records.

C. Supplemental Material: The following is publicity prepared for Garden Week in Virginia:

"Seymour House is one of numerous interesting old homes situated in the Court House Town of Accomac, formerly Drummondtown. The history of this house dates back to September 28, 1791 at which time the trustees of the Town of Drummond sold, for two pounds and fourteen shillings, two lots to Fenwick Fisher, Doctor of Phisick, the terms of sale requiring that a house be built on the lots within two years. Dr. Fisher built the small west section of the house to secure his deed and in characteristic Eastern Shore fashion other sections were subsequently added. Upon the death of Fenwick Fisher the property was inherited by his son Thomas R. Fisher who in 1816 left it to his sister Elizabeth, then the wife of William P. Custis, and later wife of Hugh G. Seymour from whom the current name of the house was derived. Early in the twentieth century the property was purchased by Judge Samuel T. Ross whose grand-daughter, Mrs. George T. Buck, Jr., now owns Seymour House. It is the home of her mother, Mrs. Samuel J. Ross.

"The Seymour House is a long frame structure fronting on Highway 13. One now enters the house from the rear and on this side are three entrance porches, two of which retain the original arched plaster ceilings, the third is a "lean-to" behind the kitchen. The interior woodwork is outstanding with handsomely carved mantels and dado in both parlor and dining room. An unusual architectural feature is a colomade room with gracefully arched ceiling. Original hardware includes massive brass locks, delicate H and L cupboard hinges and jamb hooks to hold the fire tongs. Among the interesting furnishings is an enormous walnut sea chest with heavy iron handles and lock; this once belonged to an early member of the Custis family and dates from about 1640.

"In the rear of the house is an old garden containing nine squares of ancient boxwood and at the end of the garden is the burial plot of Doctor Fisher's family. Among the markers is one for a son lost at sea and another for his daughter, Elizabeth Fisher, the tombstone inscription stating that she was the wife of William P. Custis by whose side she was buried but making no mention of her second husband, Hugh G. Seymour.

"Elizabeth Fisher Custis Seymour, 'Miss Betsy' as she was called, was a woman of considerable wealth and it is said that at a sale following her death in 1864 two full days were required for the auction of her linens alone. An inventory of the items sold and the price paid for each is still in the house.

"Close by the house is an old circular ice house with conical roof, one of the few such ice houses remaining on the Shore.

"Seymour House has its share of legends. A big black dog is said to have appeared one night and badly frightened the women of the family,

one of whom was ill. Help was called and the dog was shot and killed after he had gone four steps up the stairs. Before the eyes of the frightened spectators the dog's body disappeared into space and was never seen again but four nights later, and at the same hour, the ill woman died. Another tale tells of a baby being smothered to death in one of the upstairs cupboards and of the cries that were heard on windy nights for many years afterwards. Still another story concerns a feud between the owners of Seymour House and their neighbors across the street. Their dislike grew so intense that the neighbor had two windows of his home bricked up so that he would not be offended by the sight of his enemy."

Prepared by Commander John A. Upshur
Consultant, Colonial Williamsburg
February 1962.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a good example of type known as "Big Room, Little Room, Colonnade, and Kitchen" with very fine woodwork and hardware.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories; 102'-6" x 20'-6".

2. Foundations: Brick, no basement.

3. Wall construction: Frame; beaded edge clapboards on wood studs.

4. Openings:

a. Doors: Double-leaved entrance doors at both ends of central hallway of main structure.

b. Windows: Nine over nine light sash in first floor windows of main structure with six over nine light sash in second floor windows. Windows of remainder, six over six light sash. Wood, molded window sills on main portion of structure.

5. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs over each of the four sections of the complex; now covered with asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: Simple, wood box cornice with decorative eave terminals.

6. Chimneys: Brick - 19 courses above ridge line with corbeled caps on both ends of main structure and located at gable ends within the structure. Kitchen chimney outside of structure.

C. Technical Description of Interior.

1. Floor plan: Main structure has two rooms, on first and second floors, separated by a 10'-0" wide stair hall. Kitchen is 17'-8" x 15'-3", connected to main structure by so-called colonnade of two rooms, all on one floor level. Colonnade room nearest main house section has an arched plaster ceiling.

2. Stairways: Only stairway is in main hallway with landing. Floor height from first to second is 10'-0".

3. Flooring: Random width pine floors.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls and ceilings with wood wainscot in first floor rooms and hall of main section of structure.

5. Doors: Paneled doors.

6. Trim: Mantels in main house are outstanding with elaborate carving and marble surrounds around fireplace openings.

7. Hardware: Brass rim locks.

8. Lighting: House wired for electricity.

9. Heating: Space heaters now take the place of fireplaces.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Within town of Accomac fronting closely on Highway #13. Yard at rear. Faces west northwest.

2. Outbuildings: Ice house 17' in diameter in ground built of brick projecting 3' above grade and has conical, shingled roof.

3. Landscaping: Nine squares of old boxwood; also burial plot.

Prepared by Archie W. Franzen, Architect
National Park Service
March 1960.